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*courage is contagious*

## Viewing cable 09SANAA2230, YEMEN'S COUNTER TERRORISM UNIT STRETCHED THIN BY

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### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09SANAA2230**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">09SANAA2230</a>	<a href="#">2009-12-17 12:54</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">SECRET//NOFORN</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Sanaa</a>

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VZCZCXRO9119  
RR RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHDIR RUEHKUK RUEHTRO  
DE RUEHYN #2230/01 3511254  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
R 171254Z DEC 09  
FM AMEMBASSY SANAA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3405  
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 002230

SIPDIS  
NOFORN

DEPT FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD AND INR JYAPHE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/01/2019  
TAGS: [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [PINS](#) [MASS](#) [PGOV](#) [YM](#)  
SUBJECT: YEMEN'S COUNTER TERRORISM UNIT STRETCHED THIN BY  
WAR AGAINST HOUTHIS

REF: A. SANAA 01995  
b. SANAA 02079  
c. SANAA 01669

¶1. (S/NF) SUMMARY. As the sixth war against the Houthis continues to squeeze Yemen's conventional military, the ROYG has looked to its U.S. and U.K.-funded and trained counterterrorism forces to provide some relief to battered army forces. The Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU) - trained to detect small terrorist cells and investigate and prevent terror attacks on civilian targets - is a poor tactical choice for use against a long-term domestic insurgency. The ROYG, desperate to defeat the Houthis at any cost, has largely ignored USG concerns regarding deployment of the CTU to Sa'ada. The CTU has been unable to go after genuine terrorist targets like al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) while it has been tied down in Sa'ada. CTU involvement in a ROYG operation against AQAP on the morning of December 17 is a welcome return to its core mission, although it remains to be seen if this was any more than a one-off occurrence. END SUMMARY.

#### Signs of royg desperation in sa'ada

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¶2. (C) As the sixth war in Sa'ada, now in its fifth month, drags on in a tit-for-tat struggle between ROYG military forces and Houthi rebels, the ROYG has attempted to use its elite CT forces to provide needed extra muscle. xxxxxx, told PolOff in late November that he felt his forces were being pulled into the Sa'ada conflict because of the perception that the CTU is made up of "super-men that can solve any problem and defeat anybody." (Note: CTU forces were initially sent to Sa'ada in July to investigate the kidnapping of a group of Western aid workers. Post assesses that the CTU was drawn into the Houthi conflict in early September. End Note.) Such a misperception of the CTU's capabilities and mission was hurting the unit, xxxxxx added. During the U.S.-Yemen Joint Staff Talks hosted in Sana'a November 8-11, xxxxxx publicly impressed upon Brigadier General Ali Dahan of the Yemen Special Operations Forces (YSOF), another elite military unit also involved in CT operations, and other senior Ministry of Defense (MOD) leadership the severity of the situation in Sa'ada and the toll it was taking on the CTU. He told Dahan, "You may not be feeling the hurt of this war, but the CTU is fighting in Sa'ada and is taking casualties." (COMMENT: xxxxxx was angry with Dahan for stating that the YSOF was "ready and available for more training exercises with U.S. forces" while the CTU was being deployed in Sa'ada. He believes the YSOF should be doing more in Sa'ada, which would allow the CTU to return to its primary mission. END COMMENT.)

¶3. (S/NF) Increasingly desperate to defeat the Houthis, the ROYG continues to insist that fighting the Houthis is a legitimate component of CT operations, thus justifying the use of CTU forces in Sa'ada. The National Security Bureau's Colonel Akram al-Qassmi told PolOffs on December 9, "The war against the Houthis is not a distraction from the CT fight. It is the CT fight." xxxxxx Despite the injection of CTU forces into the fight three months ago, the Sa'ada war drags on and, according to CTU leadership, the CTU is taking "heavy casualties" due to their lack of training for this type of warfare. At the urging of CTU leadership, the Supreme Security Council agreed to move all CTU forces (two platoons) out of Sa'ada on December 9. xxxxxx confirmed that the MOI Regional Commander ordered elements of the CTU, believed to be one platoon, to remain in Sa'ada until Sa'ada City is cleared of Houthi fighters.

#### Ct operations constrained due to sa'ada war

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¶4. (S/NF) Following the return of one platoon to Sana'a, the CTU undertook its first CT operation against AQAP in four months on the morning of December 17. However, according to xxxxxx deployment to Sa'ada has hurt the CTU's readiness capabilities. Ideally, the unit is primed for rapid response to any CT threat in and around Sana'a within 10 minutes. The

CTU is broken into four platoons which rotate every two weeks: one on leave, a second in training, a third on standby, and a fourth as a Quick Reaction Force (QRF). With one platoon in Sa'ada, and another on active duty in Sana'a, the CTU has no surge capacity. xxxxx said that the CTU's training and operational cycle has been disrupted by the Sa'ada war. "Since August, the QRF has been in Sa'ada, taking heavy casualties because they have been engaged in heavy fighting. We have only had a chance to send a relief team twice since the latest conflict started." He said that the use of USG-provided armored vehicles and humvees has "been fundamental in preventing casualties." (NOTE: Post has repeatedly questioned ROYG use of U.S. military equipment and U.S.-trained forces intended to combat AQAP in the war against the Houthi rebels. END NOTE.)

15. (S/NF) The CTU was established just six years ago at the urging of the USG and has received substantial funding and training from U.S. special operations forces and British conventional army trainers. Their training has focused on detecting and neutralizing the AQAP threat, not fighting a long-term, domestic insurgency. In particular, the CTU is predominantly trained for CT "direct action missions" in which they isolate an AQAP cell and capture its members based on specific intelligence. Referring to the guerilla warfare tactics the Houthis have been using against traditional ROYG military forces, xxxxx U.S. training in "unconventional warfare" and tactics used by the U.S. forces in "asymmetric warfare" of the type encountered in the mountains of Afghanistan, suggesting the CTU expects to continue to use its forces in Sa'ada.

Comment

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16. (S/NF) Boggled down in a seemingly unwinnable war that pits conventional forces against determined rebels, the ROYG has resorted to using its specialized CT units. Untrained to fight this type of conflict, the overstretched CTU has reportedly sustained significant casualties, missed training opportunities and been derailed from its principal mission: to combat AQAP. While U.S. concerns over diversion of troops and equipment have been acknowledged, they have clearly not resulted in a significant change of ROYG focus from the Houthis to AQAP. CTU deployment to Sa'ada, while a distraction, is not a crushing blow to all potential CT activities, as demonstrated by the December 17 CT operation. However, it remains to be seen if this indicates a balancing of priorities between the Houthi conflict and AQAP, or if it is simply a momentary return to the CTU's primary mission. End comment.  
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